

EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HIGH-PERFORMANCE MICRO ENTREPRENEURS IN MALAYSIA: A HERMENEUTIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Microfinance is often portrayed as the panacea to poverty alleviation and human development. However, the plethora of impact studies in microfinance suggested a varying degree of success amongst countries adopting the Grameen model of microfinance. In the case of Malaysia, impact studies in microfinance have suggested significant improvements on the income and livelihood of the poor. However, only a handful of micro-entrepreneurs have achieved high-performance in their business. Thus, what did these high-performance micro entrepreneurs have done so differently than the rest of their peers? Given the predominance of Muslim micro entrepreneurs in Malaysia, the study also examines whether there is any influence of Islamic faith in their business experience. If so, how did it influence their lived experiences as high-performance micro entrepreneurs? Hence, this study seeks to explore and interpret the lived experiences of these micro entrepreneurs by infusing Heidegger's interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology as part of the study. Using the purposive sampling technique, the informants were selected from Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) for in-depth interviews. Nevertheless, only seven informants are chosen as the saturation point is reached at the seventh informant. Three main themes were inductively derived from the data and evidently, one of the themes suggested that religious values played a significant role in influencing business experience among high-performance micro entrepreneurs. This study hopes to provide a more robust understanding on the entrepreneurship enacted by entrepreneurs living in poverty settings hence serving a practical guidance to policy-makers and development experts in improving current policies.

Keywords: 1) Entrepreneurship 2) microfinance 3) lived experiences 4) hermeneutic
5) micro entrepreneurs

1. Introduction

From a humble beginning in a remote village in Bangladesh, the Grameen model of microfinance has risen to become one of the most recognized development instruments in the area of international development. The inspiring story of small loans that have dramatically transformed the lives of the poor conveyed a powerful message to international communities. This remarkable achievement in the remote village in Jobra, Bangladesh soon paved the way for the establishments of “mini- Grameens” around the world such as Compartamos in Mexico (previously known as ACCION), Malawi Mudzi Fund in Malawi, *Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia* (AIM), Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI) and the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA) in Costa Rica (Md Saad & Duasa, 2010).

Following the unprecedented international support and recognition, the First Microcredit Summit was held in 1997 with the objective to increase outreach of microfinance to 100 million poor people by 2005 (Midgley, 2008). Subsequently, the year 2005 was also declared as the Year of Microcredit by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Midgley, 2008). Advocates of this bottom- up approach are convinced that microfinance provides a beacon of hope for those entrapped in the world of poverty.

Yet, only some microfinance programs enjoyed some degree of success while other programs experienced a little or no improvement in the income or livelihood of the poor. Evidently, empirical findings in the area of microfinance have illustrated an inconclusive or mixed results in relation to the microfinance programs (Mahmood, 2011; Korth, Stewart, Rooyen, & Wet, 2012; Fouillet, Hudon, Harriss-White, & Copestake, 2013).

In the case of Malaysia, the plethora of impact studies has revealed that the majority of the poor experienced a significant increase in their income and

livelihood. However based on the income criteria, only a fraction of the micro entrepreneurs have achieved high-performance in the context of their business (AIM, 2012). Thus, what did these high- performance micro entrepreneurs have done so differently than the rest of their peers? Given the predominance of Muslim micro entrepreneurs in Malaysia, the study also examines whether there is any influence of Islamic faith in their business experience. If so, how did it influence their lived experiences as high-performance micro entrepreneurs?

At present, there is little knowledge or understanding on how these micro entrepreneurs had constructed their businesses, particularly those living in poverty settings. While there is a vast amount of literature in microfinance amplifying the “before and after” effects of microfinance intervention, there is seemingly little literature on the entrepreneurship enacted by the entrepreneurs living in poverty settings. Bruton, Ketchen & Ireland (2013) and Bruton (2010) ascribed that this present lack of knowledge on this type of entrepreneurship is due to little exposure to poverty among scholars in developed economies.

Retrospectively, the fixation on conducting impact studies in microfinance has also led to a poor comprehension on how entrepreneurship is constructed in poverty settings. Yet, ironically, the underlying philosophy of microfinance is to stimulate entrepreneurship amongst the poor. Garikipati (2012) argued that statistical indicators provide a weak interpretation of the microfinance intervention. Hence, this study seeks to explore the journey of high- performance micro entrepreneurs using Malaysia as the context of the study. This study also believed that the “experience of becoming” needs a greater attention in order to enhance microfinance as a development instrument in poverty alleviation.

2. Literature Review

The Entrepreneurial Talent of the Poor

The root of the word “entrepreneur” originated from the French word, *entreprendre* which is translated as “to undertake” (Desai, 1999 cited in Singh & Belwal, 2008). The concept of modern entrepreneurship was first introduced by Richard Cantillon in the 18th century who suggested a simple yet abstract notion of an entrepreneur that is “...person who buys at a certain and sell back again at uncertain with the differences reflected between the prices as their profit or loss” (Herbert & Link, 1989, page 42).

In present times, however, there are no consensus amongst academicians on what constitutes as entrepreneurship (Shane, 2012). Moreover, the varying definitions of an entrepreneur depended heavily on which school of thoughts one comes from. Scholars from the entrepreneurship field, Shane and Ventakaraman (2000) defined entrepreneurs are those individuals who are able to recognize and exploit business opportunities. On the other hand, the economists have classified the definition of an entrepreneur based on three schools of thoughts, namely the German, Austrian and Chicago (Herbert and Link, 1989). For instance, the Austrian economists such as Von Mises and Kirzner (cited in Eisenhauer, 1995) viewed entrepreneur “...as an opportunistic arbitrageur who is alert to potential profits and capitalizes on them” (Eisenhauer, 1995, page 68). Meanwhile, the Chicago economists Frank Knight and Theodore Schultz (1927) as cited in Eisenhauer (1995) associated an entrepreneur with risk and uncertainty. On the contrary, renowned German economist, Schumpeter (1949) cited in Herbert & Link (1989) stressed on the importance of being an innovator as the embodiment of an entrepreneur. In the realm of social psychology, entrepreneurs are referred as those individuals with special attributes, cognitive skills (Gartner, 1988; Baron,

1998; 2004) and emotional intelligence (Cardon, Foo, Wiklund & Shepherd, 2012).

But, more importantly, the literatures also have suggested that there is a distinction between micro entrepreneurs and their mainstream peers. The main distinction between both types of entrepreneurs is often outlined in terms of their motivation to start or engage in a business. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) suggested the terms necessity and opportunity to draw the main distinction between the two types of entrepreneurs. Opportunity entrepreneurs refers to voluntary pursuit of entrepreneurship by entrepreneurs while the term necessity entrepreneurs is associated with those individuals involuntarily engaged in entrepreneurship due to certain circumstances (Block & Wagner, 2010).

In similar vein, Schoar (2013) proposed the terms subsistence and transformation to denote the differences between the types of entrepreneurs. Interestingly, Schoar (2013) argued that there is a misconception that being subsistence entrepreneurs is the first-step towards becoming transformational entrepreneurs. Schoar (2013) opined that only a fraction of the subsistence entrepreneurs who have made the expected transformation. Retrospectively, the terms mentioned are similar to the “push” and “pull” factors used earlier by Shapiro & Sokol (1982) and Gilad & Levine (1986) as cited in Schoar (2013).

Schoar’s (2013) concerns resonated with the open debate among the scholars on whether the poor have the potentials to be entrepreneurs. Yunus (2007), the founder of the Grameen Bank, in his book, *Creating A World Without Poverty* dismissed the notion that entrepreneurship is a rare quality and argued that “...entrepreneurial ability is practically universal” (page 54). Similarly, Prahalad (2006) in his book *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*, argued that the poor are natural-born and creative entrepreneurs due to their sheer need to

survive. Chang (2010) suggested that seeds of entrepreneurship could flourish provided that the right resources and incentives are made available to the poor.

Likewise, Sultana, Zaaba, & Umemoto (2010) in their empirical study in Bangladesh revealed that micro credit has economically empowered women in rural Bangladesh. Their study claimed that the sense of empowerment is achieved through entrepreneurship. In a similar vein, Dolan, Johnstone-Louis & Scott (2012) in their empirical study on the Bottom-of-the-Pyramid (BoP) entrepreneurs of the Cooperative Assistance and Relief Everywhere agency (CARE), suggested that participation of poor women in the local economy through entrepreneurship have significantly increased their income and improved their livelihood. Nevertheless, Dolan et.al (2012) contested that not all micro entrepreneurs are self-starters in business hence some micro entrepreneurs need business trainings and skills to manage their business operations.

On the contrary, Karnani (2009) posited that what the poor need is employment opportunities rather than microfinance. Likewise, Bateman & Chang (2012) echoed similar sentiment hence argued that microfinance generated a greater burden of debt for the poor whose lives may be worst off in unforeseen circumstances. Similarly, Bruton, Khavul & Chavez (2011) found that the assumption that all poor are potential micro entrepreneurs is somewhat flawed. The empirical findings from their study in Guatemala and Dominican suggested that only a fragment of the poor are able to use the loans productively. Khander and Pitt (1998) in their hallmark study placed an important caveat which proposed that microfinance may not be the solution for all particularly the extreme poor.

Currently, there are very few studies which have addressed the element of entrepreneurship within the domain of microfinance. However, most of these studies converged towards the need for

business training (Verrest, 2013; Karlan & Valdivia, 2011). Consequently, this has compromised on the holistic understanding of the entrepreneurial journey of micro entrepreneurs. As observed, while there is seemingly no consensus on the definition of an entrepreneurship, scholars seemed to agree that there exists a different yet significant type of entrepreneurship in the context of poverty (Bruton, Ireland & Ketchen, 2013; Bruton, 2010). Thus, while the literatures in microfinance have suggested that the majority of micro entrepreneurs are subsistence or necessity entrepreneurs, nevertheless, a handful of micro entrepreneurs have transcended beyond their survival needs. Hence, it is imperative to understand the business experiences of these micro entrepreneurs' business journey in order to attune policies to meet their needs (Berner, Gomez, & Knorrington, 2012).

The Human Enterprise

The business environment has more than often depicted human beings as resources or instruments to drive profits for the business (Le Metrie cited in Chapra, 1992; Salleh & Ahmad, 2008). However, human beings are not merely instruments or objects. Thus, to understand their behaviour including their economic behaviour, there is a need to capture them in both dimensions, spiritual and physical (Salleh & Ahmad, 2008). By nature, human behaviour is said to be highly complex, non-linear, unpredictable (Salleh & Ahmad, 2008) and often intertwined with their respective cultures, values, norms and beliefs.

Bidart, Longo and Mendez (2014) argued that most social phenomena are stories of actors that revealed the dynamics of human behaviour. Hence, to understand a social phenomenon, the human agency (Pettigrew, 1997; Abbott, 1992) must first be addressed as human beings are producers and products of the social phenomena (Pettigrew, 1997; Bidart, Longo & Mendez, 2014).

In the context of microfinance, there are numerous studies that have examined the impact or outcomes of microfinance programs (Hulme, 2000a). This partly due to the fact that most MFIs (Microfinance Institutions) rely substantially on subsidies or financial support from their Government, international bodies or philanthropists, therefore, proving an outcome or impact has become an indispensable practice (Hulme, 2000a). However, scholars argued that there is a serious weakness in relying solely on these impact-based findings as it represents a narrow interpretation of the effectiveness of microfinance as an instrument in poverty alleviation (Hulme, 2000a; Hulme & Toye, 2006; Garikipati, 2012). Garikipati (2012) opined that findings drawn from outcome-centric studies are rather binary in nature hence providing little contribution to effective policy-making.

In similar vein, Ogbor (2000) bemoaned that "...we seemed to be obsessed with, and haunted by, a Platonic conception of reality; namely, that no matter how complex it is, it could be satisfactorily defined, not in terms of sensible and contextual properties, but only in terms of numbers, ratios, averages and other mathematical notions" (page 622). Meanwhile, Hulme & Toye (2006) proposed for more cross-disciplinary studies to capture multifaceted issues such as poverty, inequality and well-being. They suggested that "...disciplines arguably share not just aims, interests and methodological norms, but also a distinctive culture – made up of attitudes, aspirations and social values" (page 1095).

At this juncture, this study believed that business is a human enterprise and therefore, seeks to explore their lived experiences to achieve a more robust understanding on this type of entrepreneurship. For Muslims, their norms, values and virtues are not only created by society but ordained by Allah (Laluddin, Kusrin & Al-Samuri, 2012).

Their existentialism (Heidegger, 1976) as a human being and an entrepreneur are deliberately aligned according to their religious teachings. Therefore, the social phenomenon born within the Muslims must reflect upon their faith.

The Influence of Faith on Human Enterprise

Iannaconne (1998) suggested that the notion that faith is above all matters has caught the interest of non-theology scholars particularly those in the field of sociology, anthropology and economics. However, the idea that faith or religion has influenced peoples' behaviour has been a long-time interest of scholars particularly in the field of sociology (McCleary & Barro, 2006). McCleary & Barro (2006) revealed that religious convictions such as "heaven and hell", "reward and punishment" encouraged positive behaviours such as thrift, ethics and honesty, which in turn, influenced the economic growth.

Weber (1905) in his seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* argued that capitalism was spurred by the work ethics of the Protestant. Moreover, Weber (1905) claimed that countries adopting or adhering to the Protestant theology have the highest rate of business and capitalistic economic growth (Miller and Ewest, 2010).

Nevertheless, Laurin, Kay & Fitzsimons (2012) in their empirical study have concluded that the influence of faith can be both, beneficial and a burden to the people. Using active goals pursuit and temptation resistance as proxies to peoples' behaviour, they argued that peoples' motivation towards their goal declined as they believed they have less control over it. Contrastingly, the fear of God as the omniscient Being became a powerful signal to resist temptations.

In the realm of entrepreneurship, few studies have discovered that religion and entrepreneurship have an interdependent relationship (Carswell & Rolland, 2007;

Uy, 2011). Uy (2011) argued there is a positive and significant association between faith and the entrepreneurs' motivation. Furthermore, the personal values of Filipino's entrepreneurs in the study reflected their Christian faith (Uy, 2011). Meanwhile, Carswell & Rolland (2007) concluded that there is no difference between non-Christians and Christian faith on the importance of entrepreneurial contribution towards societal well-being. The study suggested that non-Christians are more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

In an earlier study, Dodds and Seaman (1998) cited the example of great Quaker chocolate dynasties such as Cadbury, Rowntree, Fry and Terry's as some of the companies founded on religious influence. More recently, Judge and Douglas (2013) in their case study on entrepreneurs in the United States have revealed that religious belief influenced entrepreneurs' creativity, motivation and vision. Interestingly, their study has also revealed that the cognition of the entrepreneurs is significantly influenced by religion.

However, the literatures suggested that many of these studies were conducted on the grounds of Western-based or Christian-based faiths. Carswell & Rolland, (2007), Kayed & Hassan (2010) and Tracey (2012) argued that the volume of literatures found on faith and entrepreneurship are largely Christian-based while the non-Christians based are rather sparse in the literatures. There are a few emerging studies on Islam and entrepreneurship (Elfakhani & Ahmed, 2013; Hassan, Abdul Rahman, Abu Bakar & Lahsasna, 2012; Kayed & Hassan, 2010), nevertheless, there is too little focus on the entrepreneurial processes of the entrepreneurs.

3. Research Methodology

The main concern of this study is to interpret meanings from the lived experiences of the informants involved

in the phenomenon therefore social constructivism or interpretivism is adopted as the overall underpinning worldview.

Interpretive research is relatively common and widely applied in fields such as education, administration, health, counselling and business (Merriam, 2009). The interpretive approach adopted also responds to the call for narrowing the existing gap between the positivist and interpretivist research in the field of entrepreneurship. Smith (2013) claimed that in the field of entrepreneurship "...the majority of quantitative researchers espouse (albeit usually tacitly) a positivist stance, the minority of qualitative researchers hold fast to a contextualist, phenomenological position" (page 23).

Since the impetus of this study is the lived experiences of micro entrepreneurs, the hermeneutic philosophy by Heidegger (1976) is applied in interpreting the meaning of the lived experiences of the informants. Heidegger (1976) in his magnum opus, *Being and Time*, suggested that Being in the world (*Dasein*) refers "... to the way human exists or act in this world-for example as a parent, a teacher, a man, a woman or a child" (Van Manen, 1990, page 175). Heidegger (1976) argued that the concept of *Dasein* (there-being) explained the meaning of human existence through their involvement in the world. Finlay (2008; 2012) explained that while the majority of the phenomenology studies are descriptive (Husserl-inspired) in nature, a number of scholars have begun to distinguish between descriptive and interpretive/hermeneutic (Heidegger, 1976) phenomenology.

In the context of this study, informants were purposively selected from AIM across all states in Peninsular Malaysia for in- depth interviews. Among the criteria used to select the high-performance micro entrepreneurs includes the level of income. However, the number of informants selected as a sample for this study is not

pre-determined instead the researcher relied on the saturation or redundancy point (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Merriam, 2009) as an indicator to terminate or conclude the data collection process.

The saturation or redundancy point is reached when “...there is no new information forthcoming from new sampled units” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Merriam, 2009, page 80). In this context, the saturation or redundancy point is reached at the seventh informant hence only seven high-performance micro entrepreneurs are selected for the study. All of the seven informants are inevitably women as micro loans in AIM are disbursed to only women. As such, the scope of the study is limited to women micro entrepreneurs by default rather than design of the research.

Semi-structured questions were then used to elicit information from the informants. In addition to that, an interview protocol was also developed to assist the researcher in interviewing the informants. Following that, two series of fieldwork were then conducted across the period of eighteen months. The duration taken to collect data is partly due to the geographical location of the informants and also, their time availability to be interviewed.

General information on microfinance in Malaysia particularly data concerning the micro entrepreneurs of AIM, was collected via documents and short interviews with relevant AIM officers prior to conducting the fieldwork. Subsequently, the interviews with their spouse or next-of-kin were also conducted as part of the

triangulation process. All data collected was then transcribed and analyzed concurrently. This study used the qualitative software, Atlas.ti to sort the codes and distill the emerging themes.

4. Results

Generally, while record at AIM showed that most of informants are engaged in one type of business, the data from the interviews revealed that they are engaged in more than one type of business. Most of these new businesses are either complementary to their existing business or a completely new and different business. In terms of educational attainment, all of the informants did not receive any tertiary education. However, the majority of the informants have completed their secondary level education while three informants have attained only primary education level.

All of the informants are borrowers of the I-Wawasan loan (highest category of loan) and have been a member of the AIM for more than ten years. The informants indicated that they did not use other financial means to start their business other than from Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) and in some cases, a small sum of money from their savings. When asked why they did not utilize the commercial bank loan given their current level of incomes, they felt there is no urgent need to do so and interestingly, some of them expressed the feeling of indebtedness towards AIM.

Table 1: General Descriptions of the Informants

Name	Age	Religion	State	Status	Type of Business
Safiyah	48	Islam	Kedah	Married	Canopy & Catering Services
Siti Khadijah	45	Islam	Kedah	Married	Rubber Trading
Halimah	49	Islam	Selangor	Married	Traditional Malay Food
Fatimah	48	Islam	Terengganu	Married	Hardware store
Rohani	53	Islam	Terengganu	Married	Bus Rental Service
Suraya	52	Islam	Kedah	Married	Traditional Malay Food
Zuraidah	54	Islam	Kedah	Married	Rubber Trading

Source: Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) database.

Note: All names are pseudonyms, some age of the informants have been estimate

Siti: I did not terminate my membership with AIM because I feel so indebted to them (AIM) because they are willing to give us loans. Even our relatives don't trust us. That is normal because we don't have anything.

Fatimah: I will still go the group weekly meetings unless I am sick or had to attend some courses.

Suraya: It is such a loss to leave AIM...there is a lot of activities for AIM members. You get to see your friends every week unless you did not attend the weekly meetings.

The Influence of Faith in Business Experience

All informants indicated that faith played a significant role in the daily operations of their business and is imbued as part and parcel of their overall business experiences. When the informants were asked how their faith is related to their business, all of them attested that their faith is the number one priority in their life thereby indicating that it is the single most important factor influencing their business journey.

Safiyah: For me, the religion aspect is number one. Ranked at number one. Whatever we do, we need to do it based on our religion.

Fatimah: The relationship (between business and religion) is very important. We need to have that one first.

Siti: We must place our religion on the pedestal. We must do our business like in the times of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH (Peace and Blessings Be Upon Him).

Zuraidah: I have suffered some business loss...But, I don't feel angry at all because I placed my religion first.

The informants also perceived that having a good intention (*nawaitu*) is paramount of importance to the business. The purity of one's intention is regarded as a sacred starting-point in their business. They also suggested that the intention must be materialized by channeling the given loans to a productive use. In fact,

the majority of them argued that one of the reasons why some members of AIM failed in their business was because the members did not channel the loan for the right purposes.

Suraya: Sometimes when they borrowed the loan from AIM, they did not do anything or any business. Then, that will cause a problem.

Safiyah: For AIM members... If you planned to use it (loans received) for a business, please do so. We must not misuse the loans. If we do the right thing, only then our business will grow accordingly.

The informants also articulated that earning a halal income was a quality they strived rigorously to gain the *barakah* (blessings) in their business. Their ultimate concern is centered on the eternal Hereafter life where one's sum of actions will be rewarded or punished accordingly, have indicated that there is a sense of honesty ingrained in them and their business dealings.

While the findings suggested that the majority of micro entrepreneurs understand only the basic concept of *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (forbidden) in Islam, however, many of them have explicitly demonstrated the infusion of their religious values in the daily operations of their business.

Siti: I don't want to eat "kilos" (kilograms). Some traders here marked-up their price but they ate the "kilos". My workers here will check the calibration of the weighing machine every morning so that it will show the right weight. We want to do business not only in this life but also in the next life.

Safiyah: Some people in the catering business sometimes do not prepare sufficient food as ordered. If order came for 1,000 people, insya-Allah (if Allah wills it) the food prepared by my catering service can be eaten by 1,200-1,300 people.

Suraya: If we do not care for the hygiene of the food we prepare...it will not have the barakah (blessings) from

Allah SWT (*Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala/Most Glorious*).

Another interesting theme emerged from the interviews was the alliance perspective adopted by the micro entrepreneurs in view of the competition in the business. All informants articulated their strong religious belief in constructing their views on the business competition and their competitors. They perceived their competitors as alliances as they believed that each individual's *rizq* (provision) has already been preordained by Allah SWT (*Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala/Most Glorious*).

Siti: There are others here who are involved in the business of rubber-scrap

But, I feel that it is alright because their rizq (provision) are given by Allah SWT (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala/Most Glorious). Perhaps, our rizq (provision) will come in another way.

Safiyah: At first, there is no competition but now there are other people doing similar business like mine. I don't mind at all. In fact, I even told them that if they do not have enough canopies for their customers, they could always borrow mine.

Fatimah: There are about two to three people doing the same business as me in this area. But, I don't mind as our rizq (provision) are given by Allah SWT (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala/Most Glorious)

Interestingly, the informants have also showed their creativity in creating new economic opportunities for their businesses. As mentioned earlier, the findings also revealed that some micro entrepreneurs have chosen to diversify into a completely different business while others have chosen to either move vertically or horizontally in the business value chain.

Safiyah: Doing business is really about bifurcation. You could also be involved with other types of businesses such as leasing plots of land or being an agent to transport the harvested rice.

Rohani: After a while, we bought a van, and then we got the bus permit... Soon after that, we got a little clever; we started to offer holiday packages so we bought tour buses.

Although, the informants had demonstrated their creativity through diversification or expansion of their business, they did not mentioned explicitly how their creativity is conceptualized by their faith. However, they have attributed the actualization of their creativity in business through the assistance and guidance from Allah SWT (*Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala/Most Glorious*). Thus, the essence of creativity here is depicted through meaningful religious reflections and religious rituals.

Fatimah: At first, I wanted to focus on my hardware store but now I am planning to open a mini-market... Allah SWT (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala/Most Glorious) have made easy for me as I do not need to purchase shelves or racks to displays, I only need to purchase the goods to sell.

Halimah: Frankly speaking from my own experience...Allah SWT (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala/Most Glorious) will only help those who want to help themselves. So, no matter how difficult it is, no matter how little money I have left...there is always someone who wants to buy this and that!

Safiyah: Sometimes, I feel so stressful because of my work load. I would then ask myself and try to think why has Allah SWT (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala/Most Glorious) gave me this and that...where did I go wrong? I would pray and ask

Allah SWT (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala /Most Glorious) to guide me to the solution.

Overall, the research findings are strongly influenced by the micro entrepreneurs' belief in the Islamic faith. The micro entrepreneurs placed the Islamic values as the overarching principle in every dimension of their business experience and life. Moreover, when the informants were asked to reflect upon their business accomplishments, all of them contributed

their high-business performance and overall achievements to subjective meanings. They posited that the meaning of achievement is not merely confined to self-achievement and possession of assets or materials but, rather how their businesses have helped those in needs. Ultimately, their accomplishments are all about seeking the pleasures and blessings of Allah SWT (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala/Most Glorious)

Halimah: I like help other people in need...I will definitely help others. That is my principle in life. I don't want to use rizq (provision) given by Allah SWT (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala/Most Glorious) just entirely on myself.

Fatimah: For me, the real success is when we are successful in the eyes of Allah SWT (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala/Most Glorious). When we achieve success in His eyes, only then, we will achieve success in this life and the Hereafter.

4. Conclusions

The findings from this study have demonstrated that religion or faith is clearly ingrained in the business experience of high-performance micro entrepreneurs particularly on the context of Muslim micro entrepreneurs. These findings are significant and relevant in a number of ways. Firstly, the findings from this study respond to the lack of literature on how the Islamic faith influences entrepreneurship. With the strong dominance of Western European perspective in the field of entrepreneurship (Vallier, 2012; Judge and Douglas, 2013), this study hopes to respond to the call for more literature on the Islamic faith in the field of entrepreneurship.

Secondly, the findings provide an impetus for policy-makers and development experts to design a more robust policy

on microfinance and entrepreneurship with the infusion of faith. Moreover, the Eurocentric approach in entrepreneurship may be incongruent in the context of the Muslim entrepreneurs as well as micro entrepreneurs. The findings of this study also hope to stimulate innovative ideas among Muslim communities. As observed in this study, the influence of faith is incorporated in every dimension of their business experiences ranging from crafting business opportunities to future business plans.

Lastly, the findings of this study hope to provide some practical guidance by illustrating the lived experiences of the high-performance micro entrepreneurs particularly on how they had constructed their business enterprises and the pivotal influence of faith in their business trajectories.

Despite the study's hopes to shed some lights on the influences of the Islamic faith in business, it is quite limited in terms of its generalizability due to the small and purposive sampling used. Nevertheless, the focus of this study is on the peculiarity rather than the generalizability as this an interpretive study. Secondly, the significance of this study to other micro entrepreneurs in other countries could also vary in due to differences in cultures, religion, norms and values, social and economic exposures.

To conclude, while the practicality of this phenomenological-inspired interpretive study may appear as too abstract or fuzzy, the benefit yield is perhaps best described by Van Manen (1990) that "...we come to a fuller grasp of what it means to be the world as a man, a woman, a child, taking into account the sociocultural and the historical traditions that have given meanings to our ways of being in the world"

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